
Legislative Summary

Community College Authority to Grant Baccalaureate Degrees in Applied and Technical Areas

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Contact:
Mike Hansen, MCCA President
(517) 372-4350
mhansen@mcca.org



Introduction and Background

Community college offering of select baccalaureate degrees is a fast-growing trend in higher education. A number of states currently authorize community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees under certain circumstances: Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia. Legislation is pending in a number of other states.

Research, Reports and Recommendations

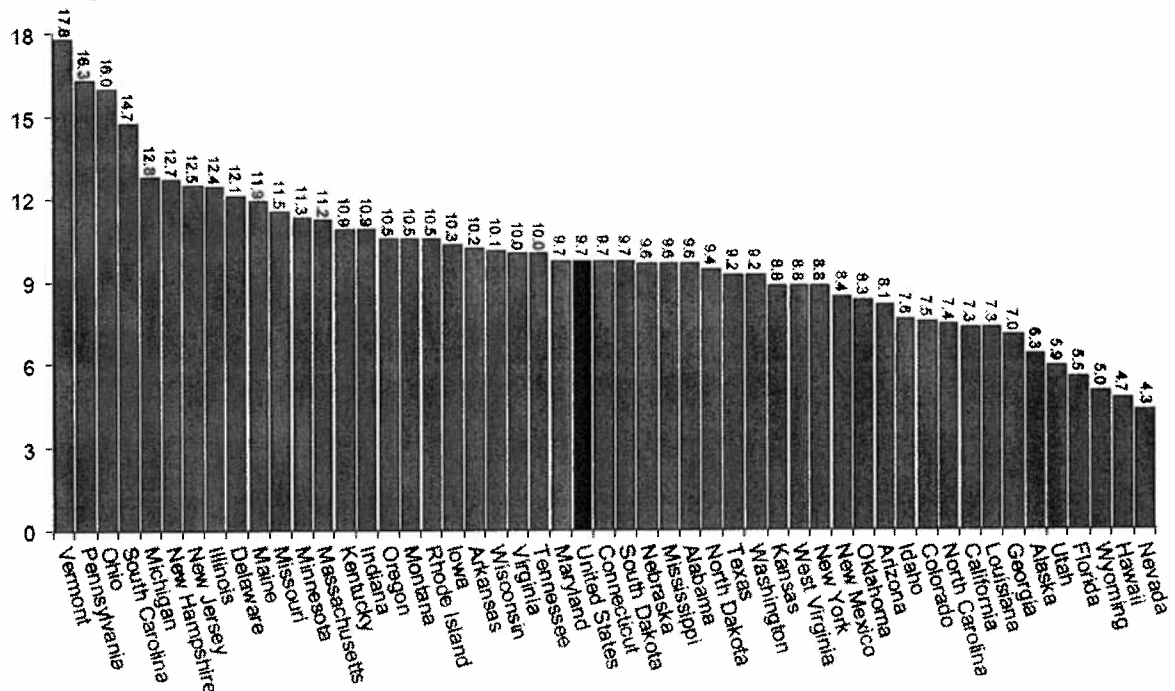
The community college baccalaureate concept has been researched and recommended by both state and national organizations.

- Released in December 2004, the first public policy document in Michigan to advance the notion of the community colleges offering baccalaureates was the *Lieutenant Governor's Commission on Higher Education and Economic Growth* (Cherry Commission). *Recommendation: "The Michigan legislature must pass enabling legislation that defines the criteria and process by which Michigan community colleges may offer applied baccalaureate degrees in response to unmet economic, employer, or community needs in their service regions."*
- In October of 2007, the legislature charged the Department for Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG) with commissioning a study to identify communities or regions within Michigan with broad labor market needs (existing and emerging) that align with the concept and educational purposes of applied baccalaureate degrees. DLEG contracted with the Voorhees Group to conduct the legislative study, which was completed on April 1, 2008. *Recommendation: "Michigan implement applied baccalaureate degrees in its community colleges."*
- In March 2008, the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington DC (with support from the W. K. Kellogg foundation), concluded in their study *Higher Education in Michigan: Overcoming Challenges to Expand Access* that the baccalaureate authority for community colleges should be considered in Michigan. *Recommendation: "Allow selected community colleges in regions with insufficient higher education access to confer baccalaureate degrees in high-need fields."*

Access and Affordability

Although there is limited outcomes data on baccalaureate programs offered by community colleges, in general, experience from other states indicate that community colleges that offer bachelor's degrees in workforce-related technical areas (such as nursing, dental hygiene, specialized teaching and applied technology), have been successful in two important ways: offering bachelor degrees *in areas that local businesses need but four-year universities don't offer, and providing access to adult, working students who cannot attend a traditional university*. Access – particularly *financial* access – to baccalaureate education is critically important for Michigan. As the chart below illustrates, Michigan has the fifth highest tuition for public 4-year universities.

Figure 45. Public 4-Year Undergraduate Tuition and Fees as a Percent of Median Family Income—Adults Aged 25-44, 2005-06



U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 ACS (Public Use Microdata Samples); IPEDS Institutional Characteristics Survey

Source: Adult Learning in Focus: National and State-by-State Data (2008). Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in partnership with NCHEMS.

Michigan Proposed Legislation

As introduced, Michigan's proposed legislation by Representative John Walsh (R-Livonia), HB 4837 would allow the State's community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in applied and technical programs in areas of nursing, cement technology, and culinary arts. (Maritime Technology has been introduced as an amendment.)

Benefits to Community Colleges Offering Baccalaureates

The baccalaureate in applied and technical areas would allow colleges to:

- **Increase Access:** The community college baccalaureate would allow colleges to address the unmet needs of older, part-time, and working students who are typically more place-bound. The pursuit of selected baccalaureate degrees is first and foremost about meeting the access needs of students who cannot, for whatever reason, attend a traditional four-year university in a selected program area. These baccalaureate programs would particularly be more accessible *financially*, since cost will likely be below those of the senior institutions even if community colleges charge higher rates for upper-division classes. **Access and affordability have always – and will continue – to be a core mission and strength of community colleges.**
- **Respond to Critical Workforce Shortages:** Michigan is at a critical point in its history. As the state transitions to a knowledge-based economy, increasing the educational attainment of the workforce is paramount. The community college baccalaureate would allow colleges to respond to workforce shortages in specific regions, and in specific occupations and industries.
- **Meet Employer Needs:** Community colleges are uniquely positioned to respond to employer needs, and the baccalaureate would allow colleges to respond to industry-specific demand for baccalaureate prepared workers.

Responding to Common Concerns

Universities fear community colleges will encroach on their turf. More importantly they fear as this movement becomes more popular, it will divert resources from the state's funding for public four-year universities.

Community colleges acknowledge these concerns, but we more importantly argue that it is critical to Michigan's economic future and competitiveness that the evolution of the higher education system in the state – in order to meet the demand and significantly accelerate the

number of citizens with baccalaureate degrees - be based on *what is best for students* versus *what is best for institutions*. But in addressing the specific concerns of the state's higher education community:

- **Drain on State Resources:** The argument that the community college baccalaureate would be a potential new drain on limited state resources is not valid. Any increase in costs for the last two years of a baccalaureate degree at a community college could be covered by a modest differential tuition increase – there would be no direct impact on state appropriations. These programs would be self-funded and self-sustaining, and would build upon existing Associate-level programs, where faculty, facilities, equipment, technology, and capacity are already in place to support baccalaureate-level programming. Further, **the cost to the student would likely still be significantly less than tuition charged by 4-year institutions.**
- **Program Quality:** The argument that the community college baccalaureate would be of inferior quality is not substantiated based on current performance of community college graduates. For instance, community college Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) graduates take the same state licensure exam to become a Registered Nurse (RN) as do the university graduates with 4-year degrees. Historically, community college ADN graduates score as well or better on the state board exam. Additionally, research shows that community college transfer students, in all disciplines, generally do as well or better at 4-year institutions as compared to the native university student. But most importantly, **these programs would have to go through the same rigorous accreditation process with the Higher Learning Commission that 4-year institutions go through for their baccalaureate programs.**
- **Mission Creep:** Offering a select number of bachelor degree programs won't change the mission of a community college (particularly the provision of associate degrees that provide transfer to a university). It simply adds to the menu of programs they provide to meet the ever changing needs of their communities. It is fair to say that it has been typical for collegiate missions to evolve as social needs change. In our own state, for example, several four-year universities that focused on undergraduate studies evolved into graduate level research institutions: Michigan State University was once Michigan

Agricultural College, Eastern Michigan University was once Michigan State Normal College, and Wayne State University evolved from the former Detroit City College. It's also interesting to note that recent federal data for Michigan institutions shows that 24% of all Associate Degrees are awarded by four-year institutions (with three four-institutions being on the top 15 for institutions awarding Associate Degrees - Ferris State (10th), Davenport (14th), and Baker College of Flint (15th)).¹

If the experiences in other states are a guide, select baccalaureate degrees at community colleges will address manpower needs of local businesses, and will increase access to select degrees for working adults and have little or no impact on nearby public four-year universities. Again, we should do what's best for *students* versus what is best for *institutions*.

Michigan Community College Baccalaureate in Applied and Technical Areas - Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Will the baccalaureate authorization require an appropriation and therefore take funding away from other programs?

A. No, this would not require additional appropriations and therefore would not take any funding away from other programs. These programs would be self-funded and self-sustaining, and would build upon existing Associate-level programs, where faculty, facilities, equipment, technology, and capacity are already in place to support baccalaureate-level programming.

Q. How much would a baccalaureate program cost for students?

A. Tuition would be below what a public, four-year university would charge. For the third and fourth year, tuition would be higher than traditional community college tuition levels, but still remain significantly lower than the four-year university levels.

Q. What programs are being considered?

¹ 2006-07 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

A. As introduced, HB 4837 would authorize community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in applied and technical areas, delineated in the bill as nursing, cement technology, and culinary arts. (Maritime Technology will be introduced as an amendment.)

Q. Isn't this baccalaureate program "mission creep" by community colleges?

A. No. The mission of community colleges is to serve the changing needs of its residents. In fact, the mission of community colleges is constantly evolving, from offering only university transfer programs to a variety of expanded offerings today that include basic skills training, vocational education, professional and technical certificates, continuing education and workforce training. Select baccalaureate degree programs are an innovative way community colleges can serve the ever changing educational needs of the community. It's also interesting to note that our four-year sister institutions have also evolved and adapted over time in order to meet the needs of their communities. For instance, federal data for Michigan shows that 24% of all Associate Degrees are awarded by four-year institutions (with three four-institutions being on the top 15 for institutions awarding Associate Degrees - Ferris State (10th), Davenport (14th), and Baker College of Flint (15th)).

Q. Would community colleges become four-year institutions?

A. No. Community colleges would remain two-year colleges with a few four-year degree programs.

Q. Would this "water down" the meaning of a baccalaureate degree?

A. No. Baccalaureate programs offered at community colleges would have to follow the same accreditation requirements and guidelines that four-year universities must meet from the regional accrediting body, The Higher Learning Commission, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Additionally, in specialized program areas, baccalaureate programs would have to meet the requirements of those specialized governing bodies. For instance, a

baccalaureate degree in nursing would also have to be accredited by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission.

Q. How would accreditation work?

A. A selected baccalaureate program would have to be accredited by The Higher Learning Commission, which has already accredited similar programs at community colleges in other Midwestern states. The accreditation would be at the Bachelor's degree level and would not affect a community college's status as a two-year institution. Baccalaureate programs would also have to meet the requirements of any specialized governing bodies, for instance, a baccalaureate degree in nursing would also have to be accredited by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission.

Q. How would this affect current transfer arrangements and partnerships with four-year universities?

A. These baccalaureate programs would have no effect on current partnerships and transfer agreements. The community colleges would continue to explore and expand their relationships with public and private universities in terms of transfer agreements, 2 + 2 programs, 90/30 programs, etc.

Q. Would the addition of selected baccalaureate programs drain resources from other areas of the colleges?

A. No. A baccalaureate program would not divert resources and money from other viable programs. Core to the mission of community colleges is to be responsive to their communities. Colleges are always evaluating courses and programs to ensure they are meeting the needs of students, employers, and their communities. That's the basis for discontinuing, modifying or expanding course and programs.

Q. If the College offered selected baccalaureate programs would the jobs of faculty members who don't have a terminal degree be at risk? Wouldn't accreditation agencies require faculty to have a Ph.D. to teach baccalaureate programs?

A. No. Because most baccalaureate degree programs at community colleges involve vocational and career areas, a Ph.D. may not be a requirement for accreditation. In the cases where a terminal degree is required for accreditation, the community colleges may already have terminal degree faculty in place or would have to hire faculty with the appropriate terminal degree.

Q. Will a baccalaureate degree from a community college be accepted by employers?

A. Yes. Only after studying local industry needs and determining that employer support exists, would community colleges offer these baccalaureate programs.